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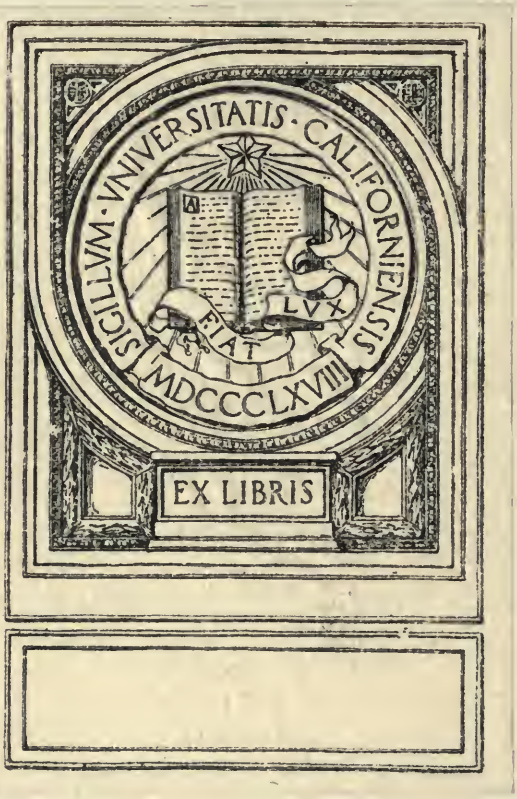
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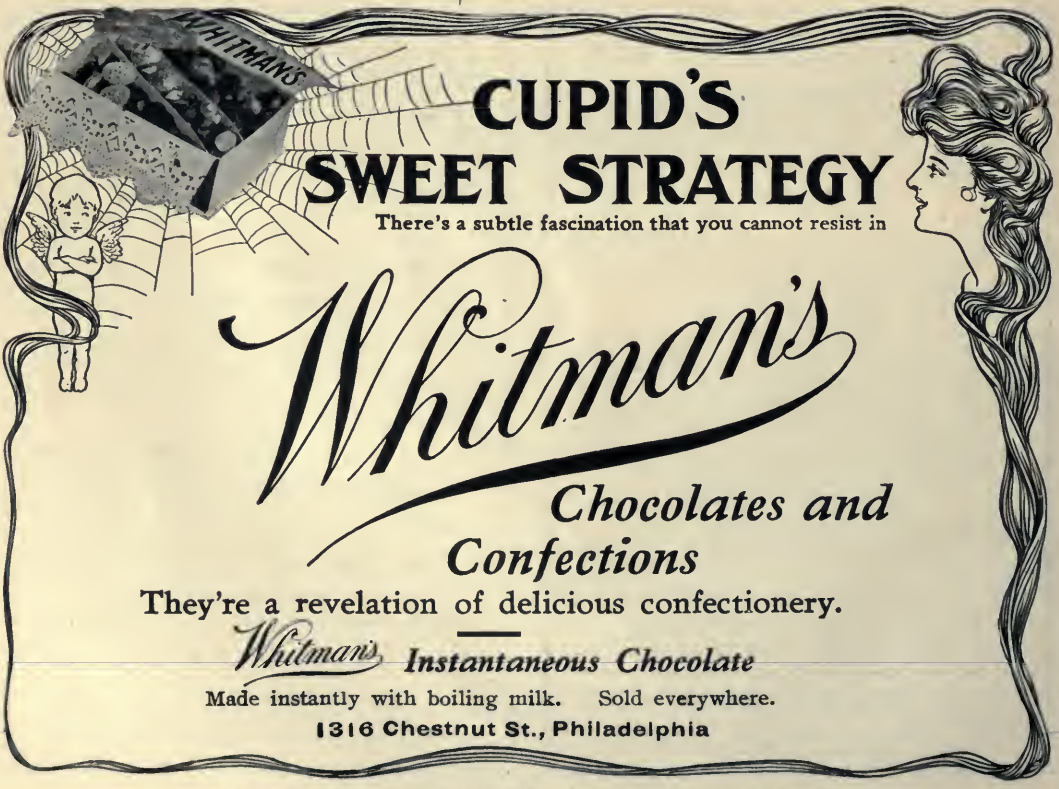

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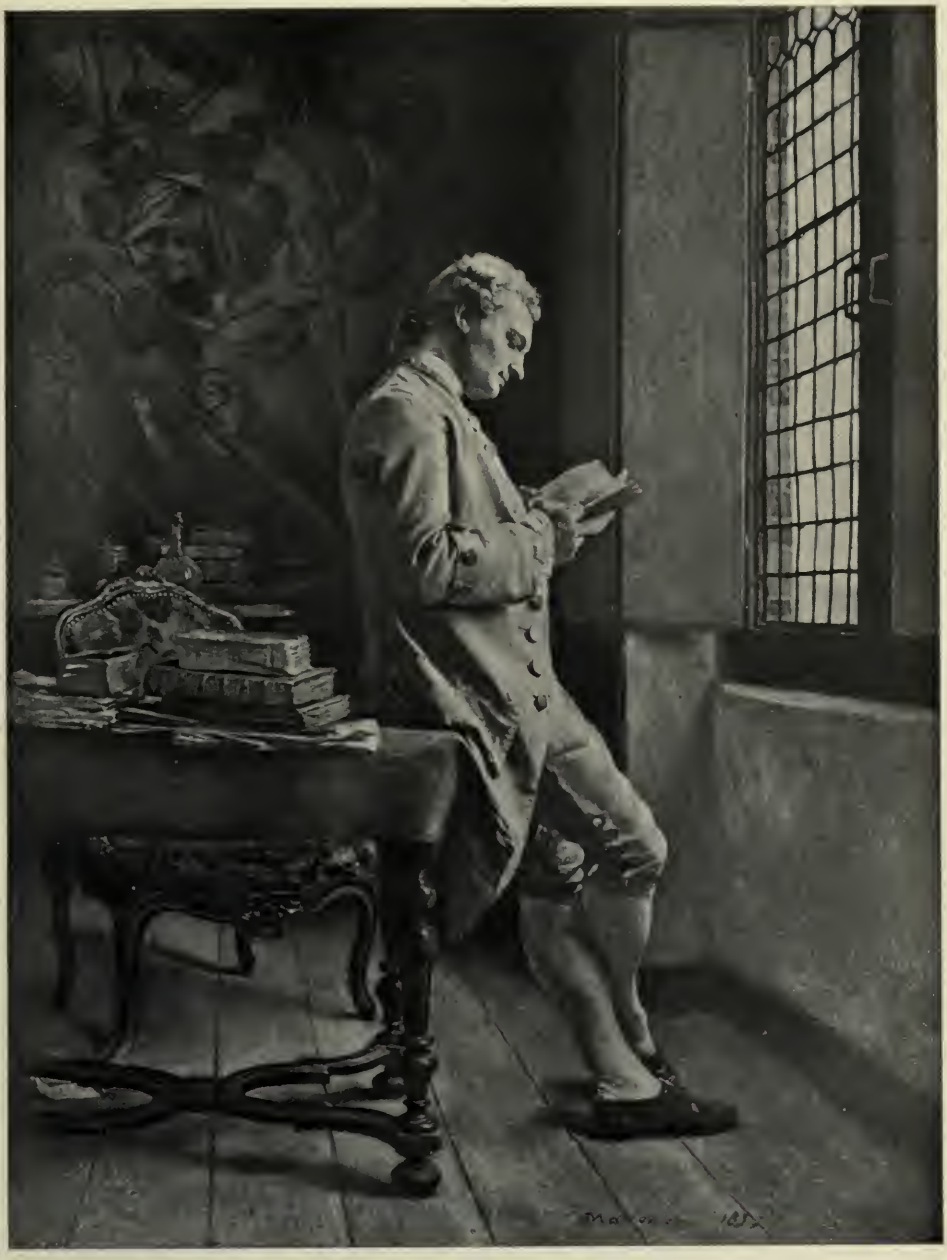

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PORTRAIT OF MEISSONIER BY HIMSELF — LOUVRE, PARIS

Meissonier has left us several portraits of himself, of which this is one of the latest. It was painted in 1889, two years before his death, when he was seventy-four years old, and shows him in a fur-lined red robe, seated in a throne-like chair. The picture measures about a foot and a half high by nearly two feet wide. It has lately been transferred from the Luxembourg Gallery to the Louvre, Paris. A description of Meissonier's personal appearance is given in the biographical sketch which follows.

Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier

BORN 1815: DIED 1891
FRENCH SCHOOL

JEAN-LOUIS-ERNEST MEISSONIER (pronounced May-so-nyeh) was born at Lyons, France, on February 21, 1815; but when he was still very young his parents removed to Paris, and it was there that he was brought up. Of his childhood and early youth, cheerless and full of hardships, Meissonier was always reluctant to speak. This may account for the slight knowledge that we have of these years and the somewhat contradictory statements of his biographers. His mother, to whom he was tenderly attached, and from whom he inherited his artistic gift, died when he was ten years old, and between the boy and his father there was but little understanding and sympathy. Strongly opposing his son's wish to become a painter, the elder Meissonier, a manufacturing chemist in prosperous circumstances, having given his son a fair though somewhat desultory school education, secured a position for him in the chemical department of the Maison Meunier. Here Meissonier, at that time about seventeen years old, swept the shop, learned to tie up neat packages for customers, and became, against his will, an excellent clerk. He never faltered, however, in his determination to devote himself ultimately to art. He secretly took to drawing in the evenings, and at length besought his father to give him three hundred francs (sixty dollars) that he might take up painting as a profession, promising that nothing more should be heard from him until he had made a name for himself. "Very well," said his father, who had at first turned a deaf ear to his entreaties, "try your hand at painting, since nothing else will satisfy you. But let us understand each other. I give you a week to find a master, and a year to show that you really have talent. At the end of that time, if you have not succeeded, I withdraw my consent, and back you go to the shop." To these terms Meissonier gladly agreed, but the week was almost gone before he had been able to comply with the first condition. After an unsuccessful application to Paul Delaroche, then at the height of his fame, he went, upon the advice of a friend, to Jules Potier, a mediocre artist, who at first did his best

to discourage him from embarking on a profession which he himself had found far from lucrative, but who finally, after he had examined a sketch which Meissonier produced from the lining of his hat, and which he had lacked the courage to show to Delaroche, consented to receive him as a pupil.

All winter Meissonier went each morning to Potier's dreary studio, buying on the way, when his funds admitted, a pennyworth of chestnuts to stay his hunger. His father gave him an allowance of fifty centimes (ten cents) a day for his meals, and invited him to the family dinner every Wednesday. On these occasions, Meissonier, too proud to accept his parent's invitation, would come in to dessert after his cheerless dinner of a roll. "Have you dined?" his father would ask. "Oh yes," would be the reply; "I have only dropped in to have coffee with you."

After several months, Meissonier, helped thereto by Potier, who paid his fees in advance, entered the studio of Léon Cogniet, a painter of no small repute, where he remained for a short time. Cogniet he saw but rarely, and it is probable that his progress was largely due to the advice and encouragement of his fellow-pupils, Daubigny, Daumier, Steinheil, Trimolet, and others. At Trimolet's suggestion he was led to study the works of the Dutch and Flemish painters in the Louvre. Meanwhile, in order to eke out his slender means, he undertook, in conjunction with this friend, the painting of fans and cards and the making of cheap book illustrations. It has also been said that he and Daubigny supplied some of the Parisian dealers with pictures for exportation at the rate of a franc, or twenty cents, a yard.

Meissonier never complained of these early years of struggle, and although he was sometimes known to wish that the days could be given back to him which he had lost in providing for the morrow, he would add: "But as to unhappiness, is it possible to be unhappy when one is twenty, when life is all before one, when one has a passion for art, a free pass for the Louvre, and sunshine gratis?"

Meissonier's name first appeared in the catalogue of the Salon of 1834 when his picture 'Dutch Burghers,' now in the Wallace Collection, London, was exhibited, and was bought by the "Société des Amis des Arts" for one hundred francs (twenty dollars).

His father now admitted that Ernest possessed a certain aptitude for art; and when shortly after this he painted a portrait by which his father was greatly struck, the now proud parent announced his intention of sending his son to Rome with an allowance of one hundred francs a month. For Rome Meissonier accordingly started, but the cholera broke out in Italy and he was compelled to return to Paris.

There he found a small studio, a gift from his father, awaiting him. His allowance, however, had been cut down from twelve hundred to seven hundred francs a year; and in order to make both ends meet he applied to the publisher, Curmer, for work at illustrating; and so satisfactorily did he fulfil the tasks allotted him that his reputation became in time established as one of the foremost illustrators of the day.

This employment was, moreover, so lucrative that he could now count upon a daily profit of nearly two dollars, a sum on which he could have lived in comfort had he had only himself to support; but in 1838, when twenty-three years old, he had fallen in love with and married the sister of his artist friend Steinheil, thereby eliciting from his father, who presented him on the occasion with six silver spoons, as many forks, a year's rent, and a year's allowance, the remark that it was evident that Ernest wanted nothing further from him, for when a man set up housekeeping it was a proof that he considered himself capable of providing for an establishment.

It is said that Meissonier's decision to devote his attention to genre-painting —that is, to the representation of some phase of every-day life—for which he had early shown a natural bent, was taken in accordance with the advice of Chenavard, a painter from Lyons, a severe critic, and Meissonier's senior by several years. "In 1838 or 1839," Meissonier has himself related, "Chenavard came one day to take his accustomed seat at my table. Before dinner I showed him the picture I was working on. It was 'Jesus with His Apostles,' a canvas of which I no longer know the whereabouts. Chenavard looked at it for some time in silence. I went on expounding my idea to him; still he said nothing. At last he walked around the studio, examining each canvas attentively, but still silently. Before the 'Violoncello-player' he made a long pause. When he had finished his review, he came back to the 'Apostles' and began to demolish them. 'I suppose you hardly imagine that you will ever do these things better than Raphael?' said he. 'Of course not.' 'Well, then, what 's the use of saying over again a thing that some one else has already said far better?' Then, taking me over to my 'Violoncello-player,' he added: 'Here you have something really personal and most excellent.'" From that moment Meissonier's course was taken: he adopted genre-painting as his specialty. The result was the series of masterpieces on a small scale which have made his name famous the world over.

His artistic career may be said to have now fairly begun, and from 1839, or 1840, his reputation steadily increased. Exhibiting regularly in the Salons, his works were enthusiastically received. Indeed, whenever they were shown in the annual exhibitions such crowds would form around his tiny panels that a special constable had to be stationed near them for their protection.

In 1840, six years after the exhibition of his first picture, Meissonier won a medal of the third class. This was soon followed by others of higher order, culminating in 1855 in the grand medal of honor at the Universal Exposition held in Paris in that year. From that date his progress was little short of triumphal. England, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Spain, and Russia united with his native country in honoring him, and orders, decorations, and medals were showered upon him. Created a Knight of the Legion of Honor in 1846, he was made an Officer of that Order nine years later, then a Commander, and finally Grand Officer, and in 1889 the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor was conferred upon him—the first artist to receive this decoration since its foundation bv Napoleon I. Of the Institute he became a

member in 1861, was twice thereafter elected its president, and was chosen an honorary member of the Royal Academy of London, the Munich Academy, and numerous other foreign societies.

Dealers and connoisseurs vied in purchasing his works, for which fabulous sums were paid. His little cavaliers, soldiers, readers, smokers, and card-players attained such a wide reputation that he was kept busy in painting variations of subjects which had captivated the public by their exquisite finish and diminutive dimensions. The "King of Lilliput" he was called by one enthusiastic critic; and it was said of him that "he could paint a battle scene on a louis d'or."

Upon the outbreak of war between Austria and Italy in 1859, Meissonier obtained permission of the emperor, Napoleon III., to accompany the French army to the seat of war, and was present at the battle of Solferino, shortly afterwards painting his famous canvas of that name, which is now in the Louvre. Still more famous are the pictures in which he represented Napoleon I. under varying circumstances of triumph and of disappointment.

With the exception of some journeys to Switzerland, Italy, and the Riviera, and a trip to Holland, Meissonier's life was spent in France; partly in Paris, where he built a magnificent house on the Boulevard Malesherbes, but mostly at Poissy in the environs of the city, where his country house, resembling a little castle, had been constructed wholly from his own designs. In both houses the studios, filled with valuable works of art, costumes, draperies, regimental uniforms, arms and accoutrements of every period of French history, formed important features. Meissonier was a born collector, and his passion grew as his resources increased. He used to visit the old-clothes markets of Paris early in the morning, when the goods were unpacked and before other customers had arrived, and would buy everything that he could find in the way of old eighteenth-century costumes, faded tapestries, and relics of bygone days. When unable to procure the exact object which he might need as a model for any painting on hand he either had it made, regardless of expense, or would himself turn tailor, saddler, joiner, or cabinet-maker, as occasion demanded.

The stables were almost as important as the studios in both Meissonier's establishments. His interest in horses was keen, and he never tired of studying their anatomy and movements. M. Charles Yriarte tells how he had a road made in his grounds at Poissy with a little tramway running parallel to it, on which, seated in a small car, he would be propelled along the rails, while a horse would be put through its paces on the road beside him, and, pencil in hand, he would jot down every detail of the animal's action.

Meissonier's patience in perfecting each detail of his pictures was inexhaustible. Indefatigable and unsparing of himself, no difficulty daunted him. Nor did success and wealth cause any difference in his habits of conscientious industry. An early riser, he would often work in his studio or out-of-doors, regardless of heat or of cold, for ten or twelve hours a day, scarcely pausing for meals. So high was his standard that he continually changed and corrected his designs, frequently painting out a whole composition in order to begin

over again if by so doing he thought he could improve upon his original work. Some of his canvases he used to call his "Penelope's webs."

The Russian artist Vassílí Verestchagín has told how Meissonier, in accordance with a frequent practice, made a beautifully finished little wax model of a horse and rider for his picture of a horseman passing along a deserted road in a strong wind. Every detail was carefully reproduced from the real materials—the rider's cloak, hat, and spurred boots were miniature masterpieces—and in order to get the exact folds of the cloak it was dipped into thin glue and then placed in the wind so that it stiffened as it blew.

When the Franco-Prussian war broke out in 1870, Meissonier was among the first to offer his services to his country. During the siege of Paris he occupied a high position on the staff of the National Guard, and took an active part in organizing a corps of artists distinguished for their bravery. Never could he forgive Germany for her victory, carrying his resentment so far as to be unwilling thereafter to receive any painters from beyond the Rhine, and even refusing to accept the Prussian Order of Merit offered to him in after years.

Meissonier was twice married, and his domestic life was singularly happy. He was never so content as in his own beautiful home at Poissy; and when he was elected mayor of the district it was said that he was never happier nor prouder than when wearing his sash of office and engaged in performing the duties pertaining to his position.

"Meissonier's mode of life was simple," writes his friend M. Yriarte; "he loved open air; he loved his home; and clung to his own habits, leading an unconventional life and following his own whims, which often estranged him from the worldly throng. He was fond of athletic sports, especially of riding. He indulged in original costumes, and insisted on freedom of action. Rich by the products of his brush, he was the first artist who in his own lifetime knew what are called 'big prices.' Yet though his signature was worth that of the Bank of France, and his credit was unlimited, he was always in need of money, and if he paid the interest on his debts with a drawing or a sketch it was assuredly the lender who then became the debtor. This was the case with Alexandre Dumas the younger, who was often his banker and yet who never would accept money in repayment of his loans."

In person Meissonier was short. His head was large, his shoulders broad, his legs slender and slightly bowed. His carriage was erect and his bearing military. His eyes were soft but eager. He was exceedingly short-sighted. His hair was thick and straight, and his beard, bushy and brown in middle life, was in later years white, long, and flowing. Vain and fond of display and of creating an impression, he was yet of a retiring disposition and very diffident with strangers. He had a quick, peremptory way of speaking, and his manner was abrupt, at times almost rude. But although he made some enemies he had many warm friends, one of whom, M. Jules Clarétie, has given us the following appreciation of his character:

"That which is most pleasing in Meissonier," he writes, "is the frank cordiality with which he explains his plans, and looks you in the face the

while with his deep, clear eyes. This man who lives in a palace is as moderate as a soldier on the march. This artist whose canvases are valued by the half-million is as generous as a nabob, and will give a picture worth the price of a house to a charity sale."

In 1884, on the occasion of what was called his "golden wedding with art"—fifty years after the appearance of his first picture—a loan exhibition of Meissonier's works was held in Paris which became nothing short of an ovation for the artist, who had then reached his seventieth year. To the end he worked with unflagging industry and enthusiasm. It was but a twelvemonth before his death that, upon the schism in the old Salon, he was made president of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, known as the New Salon, which thenceforth held its yearly exhibitions in the Champ-de-Mars. His last effort was a sketch for a monumental decoration destined for the interior of the Panthéon, Paris—a work very different in its large proportions from his customary miniature-like panels. Nothing daunted, however, he set about the task. The subject selected was 'The Apotheosis of France.' His pupils, notable among whom were his son Charles Meissonier and Édouard Detaille, stood ready to assist him in his undertaking; but it was not to be accomplished. His health, hitherto so robust, gave way, and his death occurred, after a suffering illness, on January 31, 1891.

His funeral services were held in the Church of the Madeleine, Paris, and as the possessor of the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor a full military funeral was accorded him. Trains of artillery followed his coffin, and salutes were fired as for a conqueror.

The Art of Meissonier

KENYON COX 'THE NATION' 1896

MEISSONIER'S style was formed in all its essentials singularly early. From the very first the great little pictures seem as masterly as anything their author afterwards produced. His life was long and filled with untiring study and industry, yet he never did things better than he did at first; he only did other things as well. How this quite prodigious mastery was attained so early is a mystery. It would seem as if this artist had never had to learn, had had no period of uncertainty and struggle—had almost been born a master. The subjects change, but not the manner. From the beginning of his career to the end the conception of art is identical, the methods are the same, the achievement is almost uniform.

It may even be doubted if some of Meissonier's earlier work is not the best that he has left, merely because the subjects and the scale of that work are admirably fitted for the display of his qualities and the minimizing of his limitations. It is the admirable series of 'Smokers' and 'Readers,' 'Painters' and 'Connoisseurs,' which give the fullest measure to his powers and the

least hint of his shortcomings, which made his reputation, and perhaps are likeliest to maintain it. These pictures are in the purest vein of genre-painting, and immediately suggest comparison with the wonderful little masters of Holland. At first Meissonier was considered as a reviver of Dutch art—and that he was a great admirer of that art there can be no doubt. Upon examination, however, it soon becomes visible that the differences between him and his models are as great as the resemblances. First of these differences is a fundamental one of point of view. The Dutch masters were pure painters, and their subjects were strictly contemporary. They contented themselves with looking about them and painting what interested them in what they saw. Meissonier treated contemporary subjects only two or three times, and then only when something intensely dramatic or historically important attracted him. You would look in vain in his work for any such record of the ordinary life of the nineteenth century as the Dutchmen have given us of that of the seventeenth. Meissonier was such a master of the antiquarianism he practised—he managed to enter so thoroughly within the skin of his two or three favorite epochs—that he almost deceives us at times; but he was nevertheless essentially an antiquarian, and, therefore, his work never has the spontaneity of the old work.

Another difference is in the quality of drawing. Meissonier was a wonderfully accurate draftsman. His drawing is composed of equal parts of astonishingly clear and accurate vision and of deep scientific acquirement. It is not the drawing of the great stylists, the masters of beautiful and significant line, but it is marvelously forceful and just. The drawing of Ter Borch is equally accurate, but seems to have no formula, no method, no ascertainable knowledge behind it. It seems unconscious and naïve in a way which that of Meissonier never approaches. Finally, in color and in the management of light, Meissonier cannot be compared to any one of half-a-dozen Dutch painters. His tone is almost always a little foxy, his handling a little dry. Sometimes in interiors with only one or two figures his realistic force of imitation of that which was before him almost carried him to a fine rendering even of light and color. He had built his picture before he painted it, and had only to copy what was directly under his eye, and he did this so well as almost to become a colorist and a luminist. It is only when he tries to paint open-air subjects and larger compositions that his defects become very apparent.

His merits are all to be included in the two great ones of thoroughness and accuracy. He never shirked any difficulty or avoided any study, was never sloppy or formless or vague. His knowledge of costume and furniture was only less wonderful than his grasp of character and his perfect rendering of form. He was a thorough realist, with little imagination and less sense of beauty, but with an insatiable appetite for and a marvelous digestion of concrete fact. His work is amazing in its industry, but his industry never becomes mere routine. His detail is never mere finikin particularity of touch, but is patient investigation of truth. At his best he is hardly sufficiently to be admired; but he awakens only admiration, never emotion. His drawing

is absolute, his relief startling, he gives almost the illusion of nature; but he never evokes a vision of beauty or charms one into a dream.

Meissonier's qualities are fully sufficient to account for the admiration of the public and the universal respect of his brother artists; and as long as he was content to be a genre-painter they were sufficient to make him easily the first genre-painter of his time, if not quite (as an artist has recently called him) the "greatest genre-painter of any age." In his later work they are less sufficient. He became ambitious; he wanted to be a great historical painter, to paint a "Napoleonic Cycle," to decorate the walls of the Panthéon. He transferred his personages to the open air, he enlarged his canvases and multiplied his figures, he attempted violent movement. His methods, which had been admirably suited to the production of almost perfect little pictures of tranquil indoor life, were not so adequate to the rendering of his new themes. His prodigious industry, his exhaustive accuracy, his vigor, and his conscientiousness were as great as ever, but the most exact study of nature in detail would not give the effect of open air, the most rigorous scientific analysis of the movements of the horse would not make him move, the accumulation of small figures would not look like an army. It was in vain that he built a railway to follow the action of a galloping horse, or bought a grain-field that he might see just what it would be like when a squadron had charged through it. What he produced may be demonstrably true, but does not look true.

The best of these more ambitious works is perhaps the '1814'; the worst is the '1807,' which has found a home in the Metropolitan Museum, New York; yet it possesses, in as high a degree as any earlier work, every one of the qualities which made Meissonier's greatness. The industry, the strenuous exactness, the thoroughness, the impeccable draftsmanship, the sharpness of relief, are all here at their greatest. The amount of labor that the picture represents is simply appalling, and it is almost all wasted because it is not the kind of labor that was wanted. On all these figures not a gaiter-button is wanting, and the total result of all this addition of detail is simple chaos. The idea of the composition is fine, but the effect is missed. Looked at close at hand, each head, each hand, each strap and buckle, is masterly, but at a distance sufficiently great to permit the whole canvas to be taken in at one glance nothing is seen but a meaningless glitter. It is not only true that a life-sized figure treated like one of Meissonier's small ones "would be unendurable," but it is equally true that a great number of such small figures will not make a large picture. The sharp and hard detail which was in place in his early canvases is fatal to the unity and breadth necessary to a large composition. It is equally fatal to the sense of movement. The 'Smokers' and 'Readers' were doing as little as possible, and one felt that one had plenty of time to notice their coat buttons and the smallest details of their costume; the cuirassiers of '1807' are dashing by at a furious gallop, and the eye resents the realization of detail that it could not possibly perceive. Even if the action of the horses in the picture were correct (and, for once, it is not), nothing could make them move when the eye is thus arrested by infinitesimal minutiæ.

Such was Meissonier: within his limits an almost perfect painter, and, even when he overstepped them, one whose terrible conscientiousness in the exercise of amazing ability will always merit deep respect. He thoroughly earned the honors he received, the fortune he acquired and squandered, and the immortality of which he is reasonably certain.

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER 'GAZETTE DES BEAUX-ARTS' 1862

MEISSONIER is one of the most remarkable painters of the nineteenth century. Such was his originality that without any preliminary groping he at once struck the path which with a sure step he followed to the end. In those first studies in which, as a rule, an artist tentatively seeks to find himself by emulating and imitating others, Meissonier asserted himself at once—not, of course, with the same accentuation, the same power of relief or of characterization which signalize his mature works, but nevertheless in such a way that he appeared to be quite distinct from all other painters, emphatically a master in his own domain, and easily to be recognized by the least observant. . . . The portraits of Ter Borch, Netscher, Metsu, Brauwer, and of Van Mieris might well hang on the walls of Meissonier's studio as the presentments of his progenitors, but a legitimate and authentic affiliation in no way prevents the individuality of the descendant, who may remain true to his origin and at the same time retain his own characteristics, his own special traits; and Meissonier's works, worthy of being placed in any gallery among the richest jewels of Dutch art, are yet distinctly his own. For if he resembles the "little masters" of Holland in their truthfulness, and in the exquisitely delicate perfection of their workmanship, in their precision of painting, and in their careful and exact delineation of detail, he differs from them in that he possesses qualities which are wholly French—qualities which have scarcely been sufficiently appreciated.

There is, for instance, a science in his composition unknown to the Dutch painters with whom he is frequently compared. This word "composition" may seem a singular one to use in speaking of paintings which often contain only one figure, but it is none the less correct. It is a mark of great art to inspire interest in a single figure, and Meissonier was master of that art in the highest degree. . . .

It should be noted with what close observation, with what keen historic perception, Meissonier penetrated into the spirit of the eighteenth century; he strikes the key-note even more truly than do the painters or writers of the period itself, not one of whom has portrayed or described it so vividly. And he by no means confines himself to the eighteenth century; he sometimes takes retrospective excursions into previous periods. He sends his compliments to Ter Borch, for example, by an elegant cavalier with a short cloak, a collar of Venetian point, and lace ruffles in his huge top-boots. His amateurs of painting do not always wear French coats and three-cornered hats, but sometimes, arrayed like the gentlemen of Netscher or of Palamedes, they visit the studio of some Dutch master, where they critically examine a picture finished in minute detail, while its painter, perfectly satisfied with his

work, affects an obsequious modesty. Meissonier is skilled in the portrayal of all such characters, accurately depicting their mien, bearing, and costume, and rendering with a life-like imitation of nature these little scenes composed of two or three personages. . . .

One point in particular which should be observed in his work is that his exquisite finish comes from the firm and clear rendering of objects reduced to small dimensions, and not because his manner of painting is in any way finical or labored. On the contrary, his style is broad, his paint is laid on in planes, with all the accent, touch, and even with a handling of the colors, as if his figures were the size of life,—only these qualities are all reduced to a proportionate scale, and when thus concentrated become clearer and more apparent. The hands of some of his figures are astonishing in the minute delicacy of all the details; in the delineation of each muscle, each vein, and in the care with which every finger-nail is painted; yet seen through a powerful magnifying-glass they would look like hands painted by Philippe de Champagne or by Van Dyck. It is not, then, by spending a month in putting the finishing touches to the handle of a broom—as is related of Gerard Dou—that Meissonier attains his marvelous results. His little pictures are always solidly constructed, admirably put together, and drawn with a degree of knowledge which genre-painters often lack. His local colors are frank, they are warm and strong without any false brilliancy or premature patina, and they are on a masterly scale. His talent, delicate as it is, is at the same time virile and robust. Possibly he does not sacrifice enough for the sake of the beautiful. For instance, he almost completely excludes woman from his work. No fair-haired maid-servant pours out the beer for those topers seated at the table, nor bears on a tray frail Bohemian glasses in which the yellow wine sparkles like a topaz; never do these haughty cavaliers address a declaration of love to a charming lady in petticoat of white satin; never does a fair model pose in those studios, so rich in objects of art; nor do we ever see near one of those windows with folding shutters, through which the light falls softly, a young girl busied with her spinning-wheel or plying her needle. This singular lack on the part of Meissonier cannot well be explained. Did he fear lest he should not render woman's delicate beauty so skilfully as he portrayed the more rugged attributes of man? We cannot say. We can only note the existence of this peculiarity, which is rare in the history of art. . . .

Meissonier has, indeed, introduced into the painting of genre all the serious qualities of great art. He is one of the masters of our own day to whose works a place will always be assured among those of the most celebrated painters, one who can count most surely upon immortality.—FROM THE FRENCH

WALTER ARMSTRONG 'MAGAZINE OF ART' 1891

IF I were told to describe in words what it is that makes a great painter, I should find it difficult to include any tangible gift that Meissonier was without. He was a superb draftsman; he was a master of composition, so

far as that quality will submit to mastery; he understood and could realize expression, and his dramatic power was great; his color was not disagreeable in his better moments, and his execution has never been excelled in precision, intelligence, and general sufficiency. And yet, with all these virtues he failed to touch the deeper nature—with all these powers he failed to satisfy the more refined perceptions. The fact is he lacked temperament. He could rise to the notion of a Bonaparte; he could paint him at a heroic moment, and could, by a consummate stage management, bring out his heroism; but he could not clothe him in that subtle envelop of art which has given a perennial charm to the doings of many a Dutch burgher. It is by the intensity of his own interest and by the patient skill with which he contrives to give it voice that he fascinates his public. . . .

Meissonier's gifts were almost entirely objective. They were those of an observer, a manipulator, a scientist. It was characteristic of him that in his latter years he was fascinated by the doings of instantaneous photography. He was interested rather in the fact itself than in its esthetic capacities. He was abundantly endowed with the French gifts of patience, of delight in technique, and of thoroughness in all that has to do with manipulation and form. As a workman Sir John Millais once said of him, "He was more complete than any Dutchman," and yet for the artist his best things will never have the charm that clings about a Metsu or a Vermeer of Delft.

MARIUS CHAUMELIN 'PORTRAITS D'ARTISTES'

MEISSONIER deserves praise for having resisted from the outset the influence of the two groups of painters who were at his advent dividing the favor of the French public; for having held equally aloof from the dry and colorless academic drawings of the classic and from the impassioned studies of the romantic school; for having, in his desire to paint small genre-pictures, turned to the true source of familiar every-day art—in a word, to the creators, the originators, of genre-painting. The pity of it was that in taking the Dutch for his models he should have imitated them in the letter rather than in the spirit. He emulated their delicacy of touch, the lightness and exquisite harmony of their color, but he was never inspired by their way of seeing and interpreting nature, nor by their deep feeling for the actual life about them, which is one of the chief charms of their works. Instead of looking about him and noting the types and manners of his contemporaries—the characteristics, passions, virtues and vices, beauties and absurdities, of the living men of his day—Meissonier set to work to paint a society that was dead and gone, a society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and unfortunately he was led into devoting, in this retrospective work, far more thought to the portrayal of accessories than to the interpretation of ideas—to the faithful rendering of costume than to the truth of characterization.

In depicting detail, be it of the human face or of a landscape, Meissonier excels; but the general character of the one escapes him, as does the harmony of the other. Herein he is materially distinguished from such a painter as Millet, for instance, who grasped and portrayed in a truly grand way the

essential features and significant attitudes of his peasant models. Meissonier, however, analyzes, examines, dissects; he seizes with unheard-of dexterity even the very slightest inflection of the muscles, and reproduces with marvelous surety of touch each tiny line or wrinkle of the face. But if his aim be to astonish us he certainly makes no attempt to move us. No painter, indeed, cares so little as he for the "ultra-pictorial" methods which charm and captivate the public. It never occurs to him to cater to the evil passions nor to encourage the good. He avoids with equal care moral and vulgar subjects, scenes that are comic and those that are touching, characters of ancient history and the actual men and women of to-day. He knows neither laughter nor tears. He carries his indifference to grace and beauty to the point of almost banishing from his compositions both women and children. He makes no direct appeal to either the mind or the heart, but seeks, above all else, to charm our eyes by the feats of his brush, counting only upon his skill to give pleasure. His art, in short, is not made for man, but for the pure love of art itself.

The simplest themes sufficed for him—a soldier testing a sword, a sentinel leaning on his halberd, an arquebusier, a standard-bearer, a captain of foot-soldiers in full dress, a painter at his easel, an engraver bending over his copperplate, a bookworm reveling in his folios, a musician playing on his violin, another upon his flute, a cavalier awaiting an audience. Such are the subjects which Meissonier chose to paint, and the small panels which he has devoted to these single figures are among the most highly prized of his works. Their principal interest lies in the fidelity with which the expressions of the faces are rendered, in the truthfulness of the gestures, in the life-like attitudes, and in the marvelous painting of the accessories. In his scenes in which several personages are introduced he does not always succeed in uniting the figures or in bringing them into relation with the backgrounds. The details are invariably faultless; it is the effect of the whole which is sometimes unsatisfactory. . . .

Such is the unity of Meissonier's achievement, from the productions of his early years to his last works, that to be familiar with only a few examples suffices for a fair idea of his manner of painting and of his trend of thought. In execution he is always found to be a conscientious, patient, wonderfully skilful draftsman, combining with unfailing sureness of brush-work a fondness for the most minute lines and the most delicate embellishments. Although there is more dryness in his first productions, more life and spirit in those painted when he was at the height of his career, more breadth and perhaps more modeling in those of his later years, they are all alike in that they keep to the same pictorial ideal—precision. Everything in them is subordinated to this ideal. As to his artistic conception, it is invariably the detail, the accessory, which is emphasized and which occupies the chief place in his work. . . .

If we except two or three pictures, which have in them all the most delightful qualities, Meissonier's painting, so clear, so precise, so knowing, learned, and deliberate, will be found lacking in several great qualities—there

is nothing of the unexpected in it to take us by storm, nothing impulsive or impetuous to stir our emotions, no warmth of feeling to move, nor passion to transport us. It is perfection; but perfection so limited, so monotonous, that were the truth to be told, it ends by wearying even those who have been most impressed by his marvelous skill.—FROM THE FRENCH

LIONEL ROBINSON 'MEISSONIER'

WE do not claim for Meissonier grandeur of style nor sublimity of genius. The outward embodiment of the thought, rather than the thought itself, is too predominant at all times in his work. His creative power seems limited to a degree rarely found among painters of his technical power. He has little sentiment and no tenderness. On the other hand, he is absolutely free from sentimentalism or tawdriness. "To see on a large scale, to execute in miniature" seems to have been the aim of his art, and it would be difficult to find among the ranks of ancient or modern painters the name of one who, by careful and laborious work, more completely achieved his object, or to whom may be more truly applied the motto: *Maxime mirandus in minimis.*

The Works of Meissonier

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PLATES

'THE SERGEANT'S PORTRAIT' PLATE I

"FOR technical skill and subdued humor," writes Mr. Lionel Robinson, "this picture is reckoned among Meissonier's greatest successes." The scene is laid in a barrack yard in bright sunlight. A sergeant, magnificent in his white and blue eighteenth-century uniform, and fully conscious of his fine appearance, is posing before a humble member of the artistic profession, surrounded by a group of soldiers who watch with critical interest the progress of their sergeant's portrait. The red brick wall of the building which forms the background enhances the effect of this brilliantly lighted scene, which Meissonier is said to have painted in order to prove to his critics that they were wrong in asserting that he could paint only interior scenes or those in which the light was subdued.

The picture, dated 1874, measures nearly two feet and a half high by about two feet wide. It is in Baron Schroeder's collection, London.

'THE BRAWL' PLATE II

'THE BRAWL' ('La Rixe') is one of Meissonier's most celebrated works. Painted in 1855 and exhibited in the Universal Exposition held in Paris in that year, it was purchased by Napoleon III. for twenty thousand francs ($4,000) and presented by him to Prince Albert during the

visit of Queen Victoria and her consort to Paris. It is now in the possession of the King of England.

The scene represents a quarrel in a tavern between bravos. The period is the early part of the seventeenth century. Tables and chairs have been overturned, and cards, the probable cause of the trouble, lie scattered on the floor. The assailant has drawn his dagger and struggles to free himself from two companions, as they with difficulty prevent his rushing upon his adversary, who, restrained by a third peacemaker, attempts to draw his sword. The violent movement, the fierce struggle of the angry men, the intense expression, not only of the faces but of each limb and muscle, are powerfully rendered by the artist, who, it is said, painted this stirring scene to silence the critics who had declared him unable to depict action.

The picture, larger than Meissonier's usual tiny panels, measures nearly eighteen inches high by twenty-two inches wide.

'THE ORDERLY' PLATE III

NOWHERE has Meissonier's skill in the exact rendering of detail, and at the same time his power of characterization, been better exemplified than in this celebrated picture of 'The Orderly' ('L'Ordonnance'). An orderly of the period of the First Republic, in high boots and with his musket slung across his shoulders, has delivered a despatch to an officer, who, standing with legs apart and back turned to the fireplace, pompous in the consciousness of superior rank, has taken his pipe from his mouth, and deliberately peruses the letter. A hussar seated at a table nearby, pipe in hand, watches the face of his chief.

The accessories of the scene, furniture, ornaments, and above all the costumes, are painted with such care that each bit of carving, each strap and buckle of the soldiers' uniforms, is clearly and accurately portrayed.

The picture, dated 1866, is now in the Vanderbilt Collection, New York. It measures eighteen inches high by fifteen inches wide.

'THE VEDETTE' PLATE IV

'THE VEDETTE,' or mounted sentinel, was a subject often painted by Meissonier, and one that gave scope to his fondness for portraying military life and picturesque costume. Above all it offered opportunity for his study of the horse, in the masterful delineation of which he was unsurpassed.

M. Gruyer thus describes the famous version of 'The Vedette' here reproduced (the full French title of which is 'La Vedette des Dragons sous Louis XV.'), the original of which is in the Condé Museum, Chantilly:

"Seated motionless upon his horse in the blazing sunlight, his gun at his side, the vedette scans the horizon. His good horse, with ears erect and nostrils distended as if scenting danger from afar, stands like a statue, his shadow outlined upon the sun-baked earth beside him. In every respect this horse is a model of correct and accurate drawing. As to the vedette himself,

he is characterized by that frank simplicity, that combination of elegance and straightforward realism, which are, as it were, the artist's signature. The little masterpiece vividly brings to mind those picturesque red dragoons, who, with their big boots and black three-cornered hats enlivened by knots of blue ribbon, formed part of the army of France in the time of Louis XV."

The picture was painted in 1863. It is on wood, and measures ten inches high by eight inches wide.

'FRIEDLAND, 1807' PLATE V

THIS famous picture is one of the uncompleted series of the "Napoleonic Cycle" (see description of the following plate). It has been spoken of by some critics as a "superb example of Meissonier's art," as his "finest achievement," and by others as "one of the worst pictures he ever painted," a "failure in composition," cold in its elaboration of detail, monotonous in the figures, which it is said were all painted from one and the same model; inferior, indeed, in every respect, save in the draftsmanship and marvelous technique, in praise of which no dissenting voice is raised. Whatever the view held of this picture, however, 'Friedland, 1807' is Meissonier's most celebrated work, and it is well known that the artist regarded it as his masterpiece. He expended fourteen years of labor upon it, studies innumerable were made for it (each figure, it is said, was the subject of a separate sketch), and changes and corrections were again and again introduced which resulted in an almost entire repainting of the scene. To portray accurately the appearance of grain trampled by hoofs of cavalry horses as shown in the foreground of the picture, Meissonier is said to have bought a wheat-field and hired a troop of cuirassiers to charge through it, he himself riding beside and carefully noting the attitudes of men and horses. Such was the thoroughness, the painstaking care, and the untiring patience that went towards the making of this famous work.

The subject represents the triumphant defiling of the cavalry of the Imperial Guard before Napoleon I., who, seated motionless upon his white horse, occupies the central point of interest, the spot upon which all eyes are fixed. Grouped about him are his generals—Bessières, Duroc, and Berthier; just behind him General Nansouty with his division awaits the order to defile; farther back is the "Old Guard," with their bearskin caps and white breeches; and behind them again, squadron after squadron of troops, with an infinite perspective dotted with men as far as the eye can see.

"I did not intend to paint a battle," said Meissonier; "I wanted to paint Napoleon at the zenith of his glory; I wanted to paint the love, the adoration of the soldiers for the great captain in whom they had faith and for whom they were ready to die. For the picture '1814,' the heartrending end of the imperial dream, my palette did not have colors sad enough; but in 'Friedland, 1807,' wishing everything to appear brilliant at this triumphant moment, it seemed to me that I could not find colors sufficiently dazzling. No shade should be upon the emperor's face to take from him the epic character I wished to give him. The battle of Friedland, already commenced, was nec-

essary to add to the enthusiasm of the soldiers and make the subject stand forth, but not to lessen its effect by saddening details. All such shadows I avoided—a dismounted cannon and some growing wheat which would never ripen, this was enough. The men and the emperor are in the presence of each other. The soldiers cry out to him that they are his, and the great chief, whose imperial will directs the masses that move around him, salutes his devoted army."

'Friedland, 1807' was purchased from the artist by the late Mr. A. T. Stewart of New York, for $60,000. At the sale of the Stewart Collection in 1887 it was bought by Judge Henry Hilton for an even larger sum, and presented by him to the Metropolitan Museum, New York, where it now hangs. It is painted on canvas, and measures nearly four feet and a half high by about eight feet wide.

'THE CAMPAIGN OF FRANCE, 1814' PLATE VI

ONE of the two finished works belonging to an uncompleted series which it was Meissonier's intention to paint illustrating the chief events of the military career of Napoleon I. is this picture, 'The Campaign of France,' or '1814,' as it is perhaps more often called. It is by many regarded as his masterpiece.

"When I made the sketch for '1814,'" he said, "I was thinking of Napoleon returning from Soissons with his staff after the battle of Laon. It is the campaign of France, not the return from Russia, as has been sometimes suggested. For this theme I could scarcely find colors sad and subdued enough. The sky is dreary, the landscape devastated. The dejected, exasperated faces express discouragement, despair, possibly even treachery."

In the center of the picture, seated on his white horse and wearing his famous gray coat, rides Napoleon. Close behind follow his marshals—Ney, his overcoat buttoned around his shoulders; beside him Berthier, and then Flahaut. Farther back are Drouet and Gourgaud, and beside them an officer who from sheer fatigue has fallen asleep on his horse. Behind, as far as the eye can see, follow in military file the guides, lancers, and cuirassiers. "The abrupt diminution of the line of men in my '1814,'" said Meissonier, "is an intentional effect. Some painters would, perhaps, have put in as many figures as possible, but it was my idea to suggest a line stretching away into the distance out of sight. This gives greater majesty to the emperor with his marshals behind him—each so individual, so personal in costume and attitude, like Ney, for instance, who never put his arms through the sleeves of his overcoat. A little way off comes the infantry, marching in line, the drums in front."

To paint this figure of the emperor Meissonier made many studies. Having borrowed the identical gray riding-coat of the first Napoleon, the famous *redingote grise*, from the National Museum, where it was preserved, he had an exact copy made for his model to wear. M. Charles Meissonier, his son, has told how his father waited long for the appropriate weather in which to paint the scene from nature. "At last the snow fell, and when it

had covered the ground my father set to work. He had the earth trampled down by his servants and broken up by the passing to and fro of heavy carts. When the track had become sufficiently muddy, he began work, and, notwithstanding the bitter cold, placed his models on horseback; then, with prodigious activity, he hurried on the study of details in order to get them finished before a thaw set in. Fortunately the weather continued cold, and the same sad gray sky shrouded with opaque clouds remained—the sky necessary for the desired effect. After the escort of generals Napoleon's picture was the next work. All the different parts of his costume were ready and had been executed under Prince Napoleon's supervision and rigorously copied from the authentic relics. When the time came to dress the model it was found that he could not put on the clothes. He was a stout young man and the riding-coat was too small for him, while the hat fell over his eyes. My father then tried on the costume; the coat fitted him like a glove, the hat seemed made for him. He did not hesitate for a moment, but at once took the model's place on the white horse that had been sent from the imperial stables, had a mirror set up before him, and began to copy his own image. The cold was intense; my father's feet froze to the iron stirrups, and we were obliged to place foot-warmers under them and to put a chafing-dish near him, over which he occasionally held his hands."

The picture was painted in 1864. It measures about twenty inches high by thirty inches wide, and is in the Chauchard Collection, Paris.

'THE STIRRUP-CUP' PLATE VII

MEISSONIER repeated this subject several times, always with variations. In this version, owned by the late Mr. Frederick L. Ames, Boston, the scene is laid before an inn. Hat in hand, a cavalier of the time of Louis XIII. takes his parting glass, the "stirrup-cup," from the landlord's wife. This is one of the rare instances of the introduction of a woman in a picture by Meissonier.

The attitudes are lifelike, the expressions of the different figures natural, and in the effect of strong, vibrant sunshine which permeates the scene Meissonier has given an admirable example of his skill in the portrayal of light and atmosphere out-of-doors.

The trees at the left of the picture are vivid spring green, relieved against a bit of blue sky; the wall of the inn is of cream-colored stone; the horse is white; the cavalier is clad in pale gray-green stuff; the woman's bodice is fawn-colored and her skirt bright cherry red. The picture measures about seven inches high by nine inches wide.

'THE PRINT COLLECTOR' PLATE VIII

IN a room filled with a variety of objects, pictures framed and unframed upon the walls, bottles, jars, books and ornaments upon the tables, engravings in portfolios or lying carelessly upon a chair—a room which is said to be a representation of one of Meissonier's own studios, and which is at-

tractive in its very untidiness—a print collector, wearing a long dark coat, gray stockings, and low shoes, is engaged in showing one of his treasures to a visitor, who, clad in a light brown coat, and with his hair dressed and powdered for the day, critically regards it with the eye of a connoisseur.

"There seems no sense of ordered arrangement anywhere," writes Mr. A. G. Temple, "yet every inch of this panel shows the same transcendent skill, from the leg of the chair to the sensitive value given to the stone jar against which the green table-cloth falls. Nowhere is there opacity, but a beautiful transparency alike in lights and shadows."

The picture measures about fourteen inches high by eleven inches wide. It is now in the Wallace Collection, London.

'THE READER IN WHITE' PLATE IX

THIS little picture, known as 'The Reader in White' ('Le Liseur Blanc'), painted on a panel eight inches high by six inches wide, is one of the incomparable series of single figures which went far towards establishing Meissonier's reputation, and attained such world-wide popularity that the artist could have made his fame and fortune by the mere multiplication of these tiny masterpieces.

"It is in his single figures—his monologues," writes M. André Michel, "that Meissonier attains perfection. If one would experience unalloyed pleasure let him look at the charming series of 'Readers,' standing or seated in their rooms, where all the accessories are so characteristic of their lives and tastes. In every one of these little pictures the light comes from the side, through a window sometimes open, sometimes partly closed by inside shutters. A green or a red cloth covers the table, on which are piled books bound in parchment or calfskin, and pamphlets with worn and ragged edges. The Reader himself, dressed sometimes in black, sometimes in white, and again in cherry color, is standing, or leaning against the window, or seated before his table, absorbed in his book, while on his face there is always a subtly portrayed expression of inward content."

The 'Reader' here reproduced is dressed in a costume of white woolen material, his hair is powdered, and the table against which he leans is covered with a green velvet cloth. Painted with the exquisite finish of a Dutch "little master," this picture is yet characterized by a spirit, an indescribable something, distinctly French. It was painted in 1857, and is in the Chauchard Collection, Paris.

'THE BROTHERS VAN DE VELDE' PLATE X

MEISSONIER has here represented the two Dutch painters Adrien and Willem van de Velde, who flourished in the seventeenth century. Adrien, the elder, was noted for his landscapes with figures and cattle, and Willem for his marine views. The scene is the studio of the younger brother. Adrien van de Velde, wearing a gray doublet, breeches of the same color, and a long red mantle, is seated before his brother's easel, attentively exam-

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ining a painting, while Willem, palette and brush in hand, awaits his elder brother's criticism. He wears a pearl-gray coat with slashed sleeves.

The carved oak sideboard covered with various objects, the mandolin on its top, the unframed canvas resting against the wall beside it, the open portfolio of sketches on the floor, the chair in the foreground, as well as every detail of feature and costume, are painted with all the care and technical skill of which Meissonier was a past master.

The picture, dated 1856, measures ten inches high by eight inches wide. It is now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

A LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL PAINTINGS BY MEISSONIER IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

THE following list includes only the more important pictures in collections which are accessible to the public, for the majority of Meissonier's works (nearly five hundred in all, and of which about seventy-five are in the United States) are in private possession, and therefore not only difficult to trace, but constantly changing hands. For a fuller list the reader is referred to Gréard's 'Meissonier' (London and New York, 1897).

ENGLAND. LONDON, WALLACE COLLECTION: A Musketeer; Halting at an Inn; Napoleon I. and his Staff; A Cavalier; St. John in Patmos; The Print Collector (Plate VIII); The Decameron; The Bravos; The Roadside Inn; Portrait of Colonel Félix Massue; Soldiers Gambling; A Cavalier; A Musketeer; Polichinelle; Dutch Burghers; The Guardroom — FRANCE. CHANTILLY, CONDÉ MUSEUM: The Vedette (Plate IV); The Cuirassiers of 1805; The Amateurs of Paintings (water-color) — LYONS MUSEUM: Portrait of Meissonier; Portrait of General Championnet; Portrait of Paul Chenavard — PARIS, LOUVRE: Napoleon III. at Solferino; Napoleon III. and his Staff; Expectation; Young Woman Singing; Landscape; Washerwomen at Antibes; Studies of Cuirassiers and Horses (three panels); Portrait of Alexandre Dumas the Younger; Portrait of Madame Gerriot; Three Views of Venice; The Madonna del Bacio; Ruins of the Tuileries; The Siege of Paris; Samson; J. J. Rousseau and Madame de Warens; On the Staircase; Studies of two Cuirassiers; Antibes; The Travelers; Cuirassier; Portrait of Meissonier when Young; Portrait of Meissonier (Page 22); The Reader; The Three Smokers; The Flute-player; Military Orders; The Poet — VALENCIENNES MUSEUM: Portrait of Meissonier (water-color) — GERMANY. MUNICH, NEW PINAKOTHEK: The Bravos — HAMBURG, KUNSTHALLE: A Cavalier — HOLLAND. AMSTERDAM, FODOR MUSEUM: Dying Man and Monk — UNITED STATES. BALTIMORE, WALTERS GALLERY: The Jovial Trooper; The End of a Game of Cards; Courtyard of the Artist's Studio; '1814' (single figure of Napoleon); Two Portraits of Meissonier — BOSTON, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS: A Horseman (sketch); A General (sketch) — CHICAGO, ART INSTITUTE: The Vedette — NEW YORK, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM: Friedland, 1807 (Plate V); The Sign-painter (water-color); The Brothers Van de Velde (Plate X); General and Adjutant; Man Reading; A Cavalier — PHILADELPHIA, ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS: Cavalier Waiting an Audience.

Meissonier Bibliography

A LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL BOOKS AND MAGAZINE ARTICLES DEALING WITH MEISSONIER

'MEISSONIER, ses souvenirs, ses entretiens,' by V. C. O. Gréard (Paris, 1897), although far from satisfactory or comprehensive, is the most important study of Meissonier that has yet appeared. An English translation by Lady Mary Loyd and Florence Simmonds was published in London and New York in 1897.

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